CAPTAIN GEORGE'S

Penny Dreadful

TORONTO, APRIL 3, 1981 NUMBER 632

LOEW'S 25c 11 to 1 | 30c 1 to 6 | 50c After 6

Now Playing

So well did the masquerader perform that he himself was branded an impostor . . . even by his wife.

—ADDED—
OUR GANG
'Bedtime Worries'
M-G-M Oddity
"Handlebars"
Cartoon
Metrotone News

RONALD COLMAN in THE MASQUERADER
with ELISSA LANDI
1933

UNITED ARTISTS PICTURE

Next Fri.—WARNER BAXTER in "PENTHOUSE," with Myrna Loy

A WEEKLY REVIEW

DON MILLER

MOTHER OF MERCY, IS THIS THE END OF RICO?: In doing research for a bit about the new NBC-TV crime show, The Gangster Chronicles, some interesting background information was found in the New York Times (nothing too good for P. D. readers, nosiree) about the multitude of troubles the production encountered along the way. The show itself is reprehensible, to get that out of the way; but it's sometimes worthwhile to note how even a Godfather ripoff can experience rocky going, together with the fact that the series has a fairly good chance of becoming a popular success, public fascination with criminal bigshots being what it is. Besides, Godfather aside, it's been a long time since The Untouchables.

According to television critic John O'Connor's report in the Times, the production of The Gangster Chronicles (charmingly subtitled An American Story) was beset with bad tidings from the very beginning. The actors' strike of the autumn of 1980 complicated matters, and some economic setbacks ordered by Universal-MCA forced some corner-cutting the ambitious project could ill afford. Most tragically, the original director assigned, Peter Collinson, died suddenly. His replacement, Richard Sarafian, took over with barely more than a week in which to familiarize himself with the project. Incidentally, it must be said to Sarafian's credit that the direction seems for the most part well paced, unobtrusively efficient and minus any signs of hasty preparation that must surely have been the case.

Then Richard Alan Simmons, who had developed and written the project, asked to have his name removed from the credits, the veteran scenarist expressing his dissatisfaction with the results. The credits at present carry the pseudonym Richard DeKoker as writer; if memory serves, it was a Richard DeKoker who was listed as having written a disaster adventure entitled Juggernaut in 1974. If DeKoker is not De-kosher, then he joins the swelling ranks of Universal non-writing and directing personnel, including Walter Gage (Bus Riley's Back in Town), Henri Simoun (Madigan), Quentin Werty (Jigsaw) and the pseudonymous team of John B. Sherry and Grimes Grice (The Beguiled), along with director Allen Smithee (Death of a Gunfighter), nonentities all, phantom filmmakers.

It is also averred that a narration track read by E. G. Marshall was hastily amended to the script in an attempt at documentary style. The premiere was a three-hour special, with succeeding episodes of an hour's length. In brief, the story line follows the adventures of Charles "Lucky" Luciano, Benny "Bugsy" Siegel, and one fictitious "Michael Lasker" (let it be noted that Meyer Lansky is still alive and has access to lawyers), from their boyhoods on New York's

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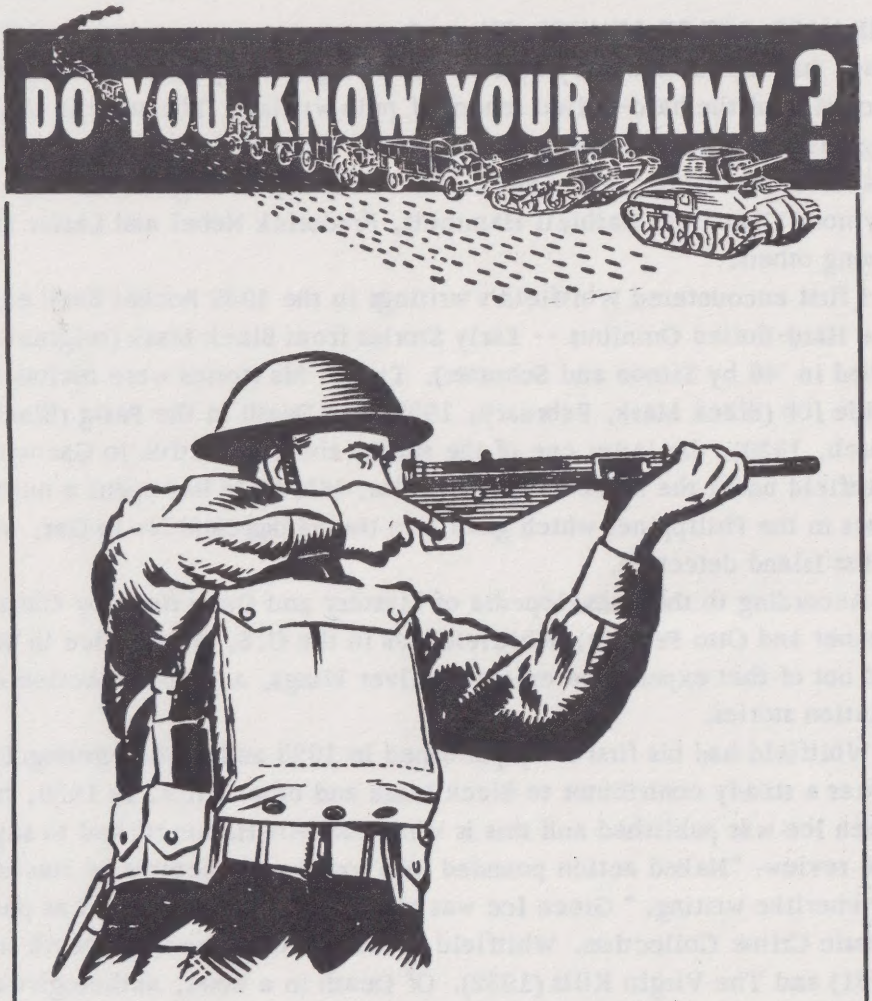
P~D SCRAPBOOK



(11) STEN SUB-MACHINE GUN

Canada's newest and lightest weapon is the Sten. It is a brother of the Thompson (Tommy) sub-machine gun used by Chicago gangsters. The Sten sub-machine carbine weighs only seven pounds and is designed specially for parachute and commando troops. It can be fired from the hip or from the shoulder at an amazing rate of speed.

1942

DON MILLER continued

lower East Side, presumably to their separate fates by the series' end. Thus far, Lucky Luciano, a pimp and dope pusher who was deported, is the guy you're supposed to root for. The hero. To repeat... reprehensible. What's more, even some simple historic facts are misinterpreted, and various real-life characters similarly distorted. It's understood that the coterie of original producers on the show have been replaced. If so, they should be taken for a ride. They have given organized crime a bad name.

PETE HARRIS

THE HARD-BOILED SCHOOL: Ellery Queen mystery magazine, in its April 22 issue, has reprinted a story by a writer who generally gets overlooked in any discussion of the hard-boiled school of pulp writing. The story is Mistral, originally published in the Dec. 15, 1931, issue of Adventure, and the writer was Raoul Whitfield (1898-1945), who definitely belongs in the same class as Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Frederick Nebel and Lester Dent, among others.

I first encountered Whitfield's writings in the 1952 Pocket Book edition of The Hard-Boiled Omnibus -- Early Stories from Black Mask (originally published in '46 by Simon and Schuster). Two of his stories were included -- Inside Job (Black Mask, February, 1932) and Death in the Pasig (Black Mask, March, 1930), the latter one of the stories about detective Jo Gar written by Whitfield under the name Ramon Decolta. Whitfield had spent a number of years in the Philippines which gave him the background for Jo Gar, also known as the Island detective.

According to the Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection, by Chris Steinbrunner and Otto Penzler, Whitfield was in the U.S. Air Service in World War I and out of that experience emerged Silver Wings, a 1930 collection of aviation stories.

Whitfield had his first story published in 1923 and in the ensuing 10 years or so was a steady contributor to Black Mask and other pulps. In 1930, his novel Green Ice was published and this is what Dashiell Hammett had to say about it in a review: "Naked action pounded into tough compactness by staccato, hammerlike writing." Green Ice was reprinted in 1971 by Avon as part of its Classic Crime Collection. Whitfield wrote two other novels, Death in a Bowl (1931) and The Virgin Kills (1932). Of Death in a Bowl, anthologist and reviewer James Sandoe said in 1976: "Try this one just after Chandler's Farewell My Lovely and see if its toughness isn't more compelling. The bowl is Hollywood's and the death that of a motion picture director." In an earlier reference to Whitfield and Death in a Bowl, in The Art of the Mystery Story (Universal Library), Sandoe said: "Whitfield is an unjustly forgotten contemporary of Dashiell Hammett."

He isn't entirely forgotten, of course. Another of the Jo Gar stories, China Man (Black Mask, March, 1932) was reprinted in Ron Goulart's The Hardboiled Dicks (Sherbourne Press) in 1965. And now Ellery Queen mystery magazine has given us another long-forgotten story to add to the list of Whitfield reprints.

At least two movies were made from Whitfield stories -- Private Detective 62 (reissue title: Man Killer), a 1933 Warner Brothers production directed by Michael Curtiz and starring William Powell and Margaret Lindsay, and High Tide, a '47 Monogram production based on Inside Job and featuring Lee Tracy, Don Castle, Julie Bishop, Regis Toomey, Anthony Warde and Francis Ford.